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PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Written Testimony of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women for the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Tuesday, March 7, 2006

RE: S.B. 455, An Act Concerning the Early Childhood Education Workforce

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women supports S.B. 455 which we hope will expand not only the *number* of early childhood education teachers in Connecticut and their level of training and preparation, but also improve the economic situation of women employed in this occupation. Moreover, expanding the number of well-trained and educated early care and education professionals will help support working parents by creating greater capacity to provide high quality care for their children.

As you know, professionals in the field of early care and education perform the most important work – caring for and beginning the education of our youngest children – and yet are paid very low wages, and rarely receive benefits. This is unfair to the workers, and also diminishes the quality of care and education provided to children. Increasing the qualifications *and* the compensation for early care and education professionals reduces the otherwise high turnover rate in this field, resulting in better outcomes for children and greater economic security for workers.

According to a report released last November by the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, one in five childcare centers had no teachers with at least a bachelor's degree. The median income for full-time teachers was only \$24,000 per year, and as little as \$17,000 for assistant teachers and aides. The assistant teachers and aides have a turn-over rate as high as 20% within a 12-month period.¹ These data demonstrate our contention that low levels of education and training and low compensation are neither good for the workers nor for the children.

We support S.B. 455 that would require the Department of Higher Education to develop accelerated and alternative routes to certification and also require DHE to work with the Office of Workforce Competitiveness and the Department of Education to coordinate education and credentialing in this occupation. *But we must also tie further education and credentialing of professionals with increased wages and benefits.* It is unfair and unrealistic to ask working professionals to dedicate the time and effort required to obtain an Associates or Bachelors Degree without any expectation that their compensation will reflect their increased qualifications.

The PCSW is proud to co-chair the Connecticut Career Ladder Advisory Committee with the Office of Workforce Competitiveness. This Committee continues to address the shortage of early care and education professionals. We are exploring career ladder models that encourage and reward workers who obtain higher levels of education and remain in this field. For example, we are exploring apprenticeship models and a system of scholarships and bonuses for employees who successfully complete educational programs.

The state must invest in this process. Neither parents nor non-profit centers can afford to support higher education and higher earnings without greater reimbursement from the state. Better teachers and lower turn-over leads to better outcomes for young children – a win-win for our state. State investment in the early care and education workforce is a critical investment in our economic development because early childhood teachers are educating children today who will be workers in 2020.

We look forward to working with members of this Committee to advance the goal of providing high quality, affordable education to all children in our state, and recruiting and retaining high quality, fairly compensated professionals in this field. Thank you.

¹ Connecticut Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, *Shaping Young Lives: A Profile of Connecticut's Early Care and Education Workforce*, November 2005, p. 6